

An Old Woman's Story
by

Lissie Rowe

(13)

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Regina:

Printed by THE LEADER Printing Company.

1886.



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The North West
Territories
BY
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OR

THE ECHOES OF THE CHIMES.

By LIZZIE ROE.

"Seventy-five Christmas Eves! How many more shall I see!—probably not another! How still it is!" All this to myself as I sit in my snug little parlor. The night wears on. Now and again the sound of a passing footstep rings out on the frosty pavement, and my old weak heart beats with expectation; but it passes the door and gradually dies away in the distance; then all is quiet again—not a sound, save the crackling of the fire that burns briskly, (thanks to the frosty air), breaks the stillness. I draw with difficulty my chair nearer the fire, and gaze at my my old withered hands held to the warm blaze. Presently I look at my watch; it is gone eleven. I ring for my little maid to help me to bed, having completely given up hope of having to greet him to-night, and long as I slowly ascend the stairs, with one feeble hand on the bannister and the other on the girl's shoulder, for that sleep—that thoroughly refreshing, invigorating, oblivious sleep of our younger days, that never comes to eyes grown dim with years and cares—just for one night, perhaps my last earthly Christmas night—so that I may not hear the bells chime out. They are so associated with shadows of the past—

faces that I hope to see soon again, but that I would rather miss just now—bright eyes, young and sparkling, dim eyes old and care laden—all come crowding to my old tearless eyes.

Night is o'er. A real long-ago Christmas morning has dawned, with trees of frost all over the panes.

He has come. I hear his feeble tottering footsteps on the stairs, and his cheery though trembling voice saying—"A happy Xmas to you, Bell! My breathing is very bad, how's your's? We are growing old Bell—growing old!" Have you patience reader to con an old woman's story? I was the youngest of four, having one sister and two brothers. Peace and plenty reigned supreme in the home of my childhood. A young and lively mother with loving grey eyes and a merry smile, ever busy, never complaining, ministered to our wants. A loving father who loved and appreciated her. One sweet gentle sister named Alice who was the eldest. Two ruddy cheeked boys—the plagues of the village, the light of our lives, came next, and lastly myself, (the baby.) I remember many winter evenings, as seated round the parlor table, we learnt our lessons, and

squabbled alternately. Sometimes about a pet cat one was nursing and another wished to have, or over the proprietorship of a top or ball that someone had found and strange to say everyone had lost. There is nothing unpleasant to look back on in those little quarrels; an unkind word addressed from one to another often sent tears starting into the eyes of the rest, thus illustrating the strong ties of love that bound us together. I can picture to myself our old home.

A low farm house with a newly built wing on each side lying snugly in a verdant valley surrounded by thickly wooded hills. We had our own special gardens, our poultry and pets, in fact we had all that country-reared children find amusement in. The recollection of one Xmas-Eve comes back to me more vividly than any other, and indeed so it ought. It was bitterly cold and we children were crouching on the hearth-rug before the fire, gazing into its fiery depth, each one essaying to rival the other in his or her description of the dogs, horses, castles, robbers, caves etc., which our imaginations conjured up and portrayed there. James, (my elder brother), had scratched his chilblains, I remember, until they became too sore to scratch any longer; then he had taken solace in tears and had been rewarded for his pains by impromptu rhymes, not over polite, made on his condition and sung by Jack to a lively air while keeping time with the poker on the bars, till we all, James included, screamed with laughter. The curtains were closely drawn and everything looked cosy and bright within. Without, the wind whistled through the trees, now plaintively, now in angry gusts, and seemed to rush round the house, entering with fitful sighs and moans through the key-hole and window chinks and then to sob its life away gradually among the nooks and crannies of the old house. Sleet was driving against the window; from time to time the dogs barked in their kennel and the horses kicked

impatiently at the stable door. Rolla, our house dog, dozed in our midst on the hearth rug, indulging now and then in a half smothered bark, when a bit of mortar startled him by falling down the chimney, or in answer to his less fortunate brothers chained in their kennel. My father was sleeping in his arm-chair; my mother was working, and in obedience to her, our voices had sunk into whispers. "Jim," Jack was saying "did you see that old chap with the blue goggles in church on Sunday?" James nodded his head and Jack continued—"I was speaking to him this afternoon; he's an old sailor and spins splendid yarns. I mean to be a sailor too." Then we all whispered audibly "Oh, Jack, how can you talk so?" and I, who was nearest to him stole my arm round his neck and actually sobbed out, "Jack, dearest Jack, you won't leave us all will you? We'll give you everything we have if you stay at home: You can have my rabbits and guinea-pigs, and I am sure Alice will give you her tortoise, and James his new knife." "Don't blubber, baby darling," he said "I'll take you" with me, we'll go to China to see the black men and all round the world in my ship; and perhaps we'll be wrecked and thrown on a desert island; then you'll be Robinson Crusoe and I'll be Friday." This made me almost scream. "Jack", I sobbed out again, "I am sure the great sea would frighten you once you were on it, and then you couldn't come back." "Baby, you little goose", he said, "I frightened!" and his eyes brightened, "Well, if you kick up such a row about it, I'll be a soldier and get shot, I want adventures. Oh! how I wish a great robber or ghost came down the chimney now, I'd very soon settle him," and he snatched up the poker and brandished it in a warlike manner. The words were hardly said when a gentle tap at the window startled us. Jack let the poker fall and turned white. We looked at one another, then, without losing a second,

I scrambled under the table on my hands and knees as fast as possible. My mother had fallen asleep over her work. I could see her from my hiding place. We all listened; there was no repetition of the tap; at last Alice said, "It's nothing; I shouldn't wonder if it were a bat that rushed against the pane." "Oh! there's another noise," I cried out as a faint scream, or rather a thin squeal reached my ears, "do wake father, Alice, I'm sure it is a ghost or a fairy." My voice woke my father and mother. We tried to describe what we had heard. My mother smiled, my father said "Nonsense! it was only fancy or the wind whistling in the chimney." Jack was silent and looked crest-fallen. It was a great consolation to me, to know he was not so brave as he pretended and, might, after all, be afraid to go to sea. I crept near him again, put my arms round his neck and with my head on his shoulder fell fast asleep. Somebody carried me up to bed, and I did not wake till the following morning. The first thing I heard was "Baby, are you awake?" in half-sleepy tones from Alice's bed, then after such preliminaries as "What do you think! Won't you be astonished!" she said, "We have a new baby; after you had gone to bed," she continued "we heard the squeak again: father went out, and returned bringing such a dear little baby—a little boy—wrapped in snow-white flannel, and lying in a common brown hamper." I was only seven years old then but remember distinctly what I relate, or fancy I do, as it has been an oft repeated story and therefore was never permitted to die out of my memory. Delighted at the idea of a new plaything, I was off in quest of the new baby immediately on being dressed, and found my mother bearing in her arms such a tiny creature, that I could not fancy it alive, and expressed loudly my disappointment. "What's the use of a brother like that?" I grumbled, "he's just the same as a doll." As the day wore on, I remem-

ber, he kept hourly improving in my eyes. I used to touch timidly his little cheek and marvel at its warmth, softness and pink tint; how astonished I felt when he moved his little hand—"a doll couldn't do that," I consoled myself by saying, and then again he opened and shut his eyes, and in my day, dolls had not been brought to such perfection as they are now. When evening arrived, we had become quite fond of our little charge, who was sleeping soundly in his hamper at my mother's feet, when my father entered saying: "It is all right, send the little fellow to the 'Home' to-morrow morning," and we all asked in chorus, "Who is to be sent to the 'Home' to-morrow?" "The little foundling," my father replied. Now, not one of us had heard the word foundling before. What could it mean? We were greatly perplexed. My mother, seeing the perplexed look on all our faces, said: "It's the baby that is to be sent away to-morrow, to a home for little stray children," whereupon we all set up a most piteous cry. For the remainder of the evening, nothing was heard but entreaties that the baby might be kept, and sobs, on being refused. The boys did not pretend to care much, after the first outburst, when they heard the baby was to go, had subsided; but it was easy to see they were anxious it should be kept. Alice and I implored in vain—next morning it was to go. In my grief I went to Jack, who had always some stratagem ready for getting out of a difficulty, "Let us get up early and hide him," said he, and so we did. We made a bed of straw in an outhouse: hardly ever entered, and there we laid the baby while the other members of the household were sleeping soundly in their warm beds. "I had a job to get at him," said Jack, "for Bridget woke (the baby had been put to sleep in the servant's room) and said: 'What do you want Master Jack?'" "I really don't know," said I, "I shouldn't wonder a bit if I were

walking in my sleep," so out I walked again, but went back shortly afterwards, and found her snoring like a pig, and here's the baby safe and sound." We left the little creature snug enough, as we then thought, covered over with straw, with nothing visible but his tiny head, and then discussed our future movements. Various ways of spending the day were proposed and abandoned. At last Jack proposed a day's boating. "There'll be such a jolly row when he is missed," he said, "we had better be out of the way." I readily expressed my satisfaction at this proposition, and having filled our pockets with dry bread we started on our excursion. It was a glorious morning. All traces of the recent storm having vanished, the ground was frozen and crisp under our feet, and the air brisk, cold and clear; not at all the weather or season for boating, but that mattered little to us. The boat was soon unmoored, then we went rapidly down the river with the tide, talking the while of our hidden treasure. "It's awfully cold," I remarked. "I am afraid he'll be frozen to death," my companion replied. "Do turn back," I cried in terror, and after a little altercation the boat's bow was turned towards home. The tide was quickly going out which suggested the following remark from Jack: "People die when the tide is going out; I wonder if the baby will die? Let us put on a spurt or, with the tide against us, we'll be late for the wake." He wanted to frigheen me, and succeeded; he laughed and I cried, and between us we were beginning to make the most melodious sounds, when a scraping noise coming from under the keel of our little barque, announced to us that we had struck in the mud. In vain we tried to shove off; in vain we called for help; the echoes seemed to hear our cries and mock our distress. The tide was going fast, and we were beginning to realize that there was nothing for us but to remain as we were until the waters rose again. At

last Jack determined to get out and take me on his back and walk on the mud to the river bank, some twenty yards distance. This he succeeded in doing, though not without much difficulty and tear, for just as we had got about half way on our journey, we became conscious of gradually sinking, and Jack, in his effort to raise his foot for another step forward, stumbled and threw me headlong in the swampy mud. We scrambled out somehow, then tear-stained and mud-covered we wended our way home, a sorry pair, looking forward with little pleasure to the reception we felt sure awaited us there. My mother and sister started when we, having come round the back way to avoid our approach being noticed, flattened our muddy noses against the parlour window, for the purpose of ascertaining how things stood within before venturing to enter. At first they failed to recognize us; when they did so, they hastened to secure us. Seeing this we decamped, but were soon captured and brought back by two strong men, workers on the farm, in whose arms we kicked and screamed, till we reached our mother's presence; my father and James had gone looking for us. Before their return we confessed all, the baby was secured, much the worse as was afterwards proved, of the exposure we subjected it to, and we sat sad, dejected and dirty, awaiting the flogging we deserved, and got. We were sent to bed, got no pudding, and rose next morning, in our usual health and strength, to find my mother in great trouble, with the baby in her arms in a state of semi-suffocation. The tiny morsel got bronchitis, and day after day passed without any talk of sending it away being introduced. Days lengthened into weeks, weeks into months, and then we began to look upon the baby as one of the family—a something that had a right to our love and was part and parcel of the household. He was christened Cecil Sheridan, (Sheridan is the family name.)

Spring with its many beauties and young life brought smiling fortune to our door. It was a bright May morning: we were seated around the breakfast table, as happy a family as ever lived. Joy and contentment beamed from every face, even the old clock's tick seemed as gay as gay could be. The birds sang sweetly outside, and the fresh morning air filled the room. My father was looking over a newspaper which the postman had just brought. Suddenly he started, pushed the paper towards my mother and exclaimed: "God bless my soul!" She took it up and read the following: "If James Sheridan, Esqr., son of the late James Arthur Sheridan, Espr., of Annabell, in county of — Ireland, will communicate with the undersigned firm, he will hear something to his advantage;" then came the name of an eminent firm of solicitors. Time went on and we children heard no more of the matter and ceased to think of it. I recollect that a great many letters used to come, and that my father was constantly away on business, which was unusual about that time. It was fully a year later when we were informed that my father, having followed up the advertisement, found himself in possession of a fine estate and income, owing to the death of a distant relation, from whom he had never expected anything. Imagine our joy; but our sorrow also, when we heard that we were to leave forever our much loved home. I shall not dwell on the parting from the old house and farm. Young as I was, there was a dull aching in my little heart when I stood up in the coach which conveyed us to Dublin, where we were to embark for England, to catch a glimpse at this old house, and saw its chimneys smokeless. Ten minutes after I was picturing to myself London and all the wonders I expected to see there, and felt consoled. Neither shall I dwell on the heartrending good-byes from friends we never met again, for that impassable barrier, social position,

henceforth kept us apart. We turned our back on the farm, leaving much of our happiness and peace of mind to the fairies there, I thought; for they used to come for years after to visit my slumbers, taking our shapes in dreamland and giving me bright glimpses of what I once enjoyed. Sweet childhood's home, how many weary wayfarers dream of thee! To the sailor on the broad deep, as he sleeps in his hammock, unconscious of the storm; to the soldier in his tented home 'neath an Indian sun; to the wayward; to the pure and simple; dream fairies whisper the same story—a story of love and childhood!

CHAPTER II.

I shall pass over some years of my life. We had spent three Xmas days in our new home and sphere, and it was the eve of the fourth. Seated in an upper window of our spacious London house, I dreamily watched the snow flakes—the beautiful white snow flakes, that used to, and still remind me of the angels—fall on the dirty pavement, to be trampled into mud under the feet of the passers by. Faces have always been strong books to me: they force their histories on me. I add the romance. I liked to watch the different faces passing to and fro. Some inspired me with pity: others with fear; and I used to make stories about them, which I told to Cecil in the twilight. I loved the little street children from my very heart. In spite of their puny pale faces, sunken, wolfish eyes and shrunken bodies, they seemed so happy bright and free—free to go out when they liked, to run and skip in the sunlight, and to turn in their toes whenever they felt inclined to do so. They had no nasty French and German to plod over; in fact, according to my ideas then, they lived to enjoy themselves, not to please others, as we were doing, for we were fashionable folks, and therefore obliged to please our neighbours. We had a town-house, a coun-

try-house, carriages, servants innumerable and instead of a loving mother's society, a a prim strict governess was our constant companion. Our mother (or more properly speaking, my mother, for Cecil and I were the only children at home) we seldom saw. Sometimes, when looking out of the school-room window, we espied a handsomely dressed lady, accompanied by a very pretty young lady (my sister Alice) entering a carriage and driving off to some place of amusement. She was no longer the mother of long ago—affectionate she was still and anxious to make us happy, but the world's gay festivities called her from us and occupied all her time. There were gay scenes down stairs, very often brilliantly lighted rooms and crowded staircases, with beautiful music and a hubbub of voices and laughter at which we got a peep. I dimly remember faces that showed themselves at those bright gatherings, and above them all my brother's loving, happy face rises before me; and there was Alice, a tall fragilehandsome girl, of whom Cecil and I were very proud. James and Jack were at school and Cecil and I were all the world to one another, cooped up in our town nursery. Cecil was then about five years old, and was a bright, handsome intelligent child, with splendid dark eyes, coal-black hair and olive-colored skin. As I have already mentioned, it was Xmas Eve. The boys were expected home in the afternoon. Cecil and I had dressed the school-room with holly and ivy and mottoes. There was a cricket-bat and football and other Xmas presents for them, laid away behind the bureau. We were on the tip-toe of expectation and the excitement was almost too much to be borne. It was only twelve when we had completed our little arrangement for their reception and they were not to arrive until 4 o'clock. What a long time those four hours seemed! I was standing in the window with Cecil perched on a chair by my side when the cab

drove up to the door. My first impulse was to rush downstairs to meet them, but I knew Mademoiselle would think such conduct highly indecorous, so I remained in the room and waited. It appeared to me a very long time before we heard a loud thumping of feet on the stairs. Cecil and I turned our eyes simultaneously on mademoiselle, for surely she thought it vulgar. However, she had no time to say so before the door was pushed open and the boys, with a ringing cheer, were in the room. The excitement of the meeting over, I sat, at Jack's side with my hand in his, while Cecil nestled close to James. They had both grown considerably since the summer holidays. James was a stout thick-set boy, of a very gentle, quiet disposition. Never were two brothers more unlike than mine. Jack was tall rosy-cheeked and athletic, full of fun, careless, impulsive, fearing nothing and generally beloved. While his brother had few friends, everyone seemed to be his. Only those who knew James well could see a loving, generous, good disposition, shining out through an exterior which appeared cold, and perhaps a little sarcastic.

The unpacking of their portmanteaus even showed how different they were. Jack's things were huddled together, and after miscellaneous articles, such as cricket-balls, catapults and other instruments of amusement or torture, had been hauled out and thrown anywhere on the floor, a doll for me made its appearance. Her disfigurement was a source of great regret to Jack. "She was a jolly doll when I put her in, but somehow her nose got flattened and her leg came off in the packing," he said. James' portmanteau was a model of neatness—every thing was folded and laid in order. There were good things in it for Cecil and me, but they were handed to us with a ceremony that did away with half the pleasure of them. That evening we were allowed down to dinner—a rare treat, it would have been, had it been such a dinner as we enjoy-

ed at the farm. Dinner down-stairs was a thing we dreaded, it was so formal and appeared such a matter of business. Children's voices could not, of course, be allowed, so we looked down and felt shy and constrained all the time. In those days we were seldom without visitors and when we did raise our eyes, a face which in all probability we had never seen before, met our gaze. We were glad when the meal was ended and went off joyfully to the school-room. "Baby" Jack said that evening, "you all look blooming—all except Alice," and his eyes filled with tears as he said it. "Have you noticed how thin and pale she has become?" My childish eyes saw how she was fading away, how her face was becoming thinner and prettier every day, and how unnaturally gentle and passive she had grown. Xmas day with the boys at home was a gala day for Cecil and me. A few nights after I awoke in my little bed after an uneasy little sleep. The moonlight was streaming into the room, lighting up everything with a weird ghastly brightness. Terror seized me. The dark corners where the moon's rays did not penetrate fascinated my gaze and then terrified me. I heard a rustling noise outside my door, then soon after the hall door was closed and the house trembled. The cold perspiration streamed down my face, and being too terrified to get out of bed to ascertain the cause of so much commotion I remained where I was and consoled myself with crying. It seemed a very long time before mademoiselle, who heard my sobs as she passed the door, entered the room. She kissed me, told me to keep very quiet, as Alice had been taken ill and James had run off for the doctor. When she left me, my childish fear of the night and darkness being completely swallowed up in anxiety for my sister. I stole to the top of the stairs and listened. All was very still. I ventured lower down, and ultim-

ately reached the door of her room: it was closed, but a very pain-laden moan which reached my ears was more than I could bear. I pushed the door boldly open and walked in: Alice was lying on her back in her bed. I hardly recognized her. She was apparently lifeless, but that was all I could or had time to notice, for there was no time for me even to express my dismay, as my father took me in his arms and carried me from the room. He put me back in my bed, lit the candle, and warned me not to leave the room again; then he left me to some weary hours of fear and grief, but sleep came at last and I awoke next morning unmindful only for a moment of last night's trouble. For several days the house had to be kept perfectly quiet. The boys were sent away and Cecil and I had the school-room all to ourselves, Mademoiselle being busy with household affairs, receiving visitors, who came to make inquiries about Alice, etc. My mother never quitted the sick-room. It used to enter into our young heads sometimes that Alice might die, but never for long, for we forgot our troubles constantly among our toys and games. Cecil and I soon got used to the still house. The soft footsteps on the corridors no longer frightened us. Anxious faces lost their anxiety in our eyes. Weeks passed. Lessons were not thought of, and it being dry, frosty weather, we were out as much as possible. The long evenings were spent listening to the fairy stories of our old nurse, who had come back to us in our trouble. When Alice was well enough to be moved, my father and mother went with her to the south of France, leaving us in London with Mademoiselle. In the Spring, when new life was stealing over the face of the earth, on a carpet of cowslips and primroses, a new and glorious life dawned for my gentle, loving sister. She died abroad, and my parents returned to England heart-broken.

CHAPTER III.

A great many Xmas tides had come and gone since that of which I have been telling you. Some few years after my sister's death we lost our sailor lad Jack, and on this bereavement I cannot dwell; he was the idol of my childhood. Xmas had come round again. I was in my 28th year, and the sea of trouble that passed so angrily over my youthful head, sweeping away those dear to me ere I was old enough to reason, and bow to God's will, had had time to settle down into a calm. My life seems to me now, to have run as smoothly then, as it is possible for life to do—a calm—probably because a storm was brewing. We had come back to Ireland a great many years before and lived permanently in the country, country life being more congenial to my father and quiet being both necessary and acceptable to my poor afflicted mother. My parents were still vigorous. We were seated around the breakfast table—a small but happy family—My father, mother and myself. Cecil, who was at home during the winter recess, (he was studying medicine in the nearest university town) had breakfasted alone and gone off early for a day's shooting. It was the morning before Xmas day. James, with his wife and children, was expected that evening to spend the festive season with us. We were talking over our arrangements for entertaining them when the arrival of the post bag put a stop for the time being to our conversation. My father was absorbed in a letter which he had received, for some time. At last he looked up and said to me, "Another visitor, Bell, to share our Xmas dinner." (Men's minds are ever on their dinner!) Bless my soul, I am so surprised, Fred in England! Poor lad. I shall tell you more presently, when I shall have got through my letter." "Poor lad." I thought, "why he must be forty-five or fifty. He went abroad when I was a mere child and then he was a man—a married man too." Ah! an ill-fated marriage his was.

I had heard all about it over and over again; indeed the romance of it had quite taken my fancy. He married for love—a lowly-born maiden, with a pretty face, which was her only redeeming feature. Steeped in her own ignorance and vanity; she grew discontented, jealous and ultimately intemperate. She drove him to desperation and when he saw all going to the bad, he left her, went to Australia, leaving her just sufficient money to keep her from want. Letters used to come from Australia, from him to us, but they were few and far between; in them he never mentioned his wife or spoke of his past life. We knew not at this time if she lived or if she had ceased to exist. My father having finished the perusal of his letter, handed it to me. It appeared from it that he had come to Europe on business—family matters he termed it—had landed at Southampton, from which place he had written and expected to be with us early on the following morning, the morning of Xmas day. I had much to do preparing for my visitor's reception so the day passed rapidly away. Evening brought Cecil home in good health and spirits, which seemed to be his normal condition in those days. He had grown up a handsome young fellow, tall, well-built with dark hair and skin, and remarkably handsome, flashing black eyes. He had a warm generous heart and loved us all as if we were his own kin. No son, no brother could have been more tender and loving to my parents and to myself than Cecil. Strange to say he did not know at this time that his blood was foreign to ours. He had grown to boyhood without the knowledge of such being the case and no one had the heart to undeceive him. My father once said, "It cannot make much difference to the boy—let him be—the fact of his doubtful parentage may only make him restless."

The next morning Fred Grey arrived. I had pictured to myself an old, sour-looking, careworn man, with his

spoiled life gradually wearing him away, and subduing all his emotions; instead of that I saw before me a handsome man—the handsomest man I had ever seen before or ever saw since—a man in his prime, with an elastic step and a cheery voice. He was refined and educated, and had evidently mixed well. His eyes were black and lustrous, and had a peculiar expression in them, which always reminded me of other eyes I had seen, but it was some time after, that I brought to my recollection whose they were. I had fallen in love lots of times, never seriously though; for a remark, an action, hardly perceptible to others was enough to dissipate my passion. I liked admirers, encouraged them, grew weary of them, and then patiently waited for others. They always seemed as willing to be dismissed as I was to dismiss them. I had a trick of making people tire of me, as I tired of them, but this man, with his commanding, distinguished air, took my heart by storm. He fascinated me, and I knew not if he were free. Toward the end of January we were asked to a ball in the neighbourhood, and round it I shall endeavour to weave Cecil's romance with my own.

Like most young men, or rather big boys of twenty or thereabout, he was constantly falling in love, and as constantly falling out again. He and I were standing in the hall chatting, waiting for my father and Mr. Grey, who were to accompany us to the ball. Cecil had his back to the light. I suddenly caught him by the arm and turned him so that the lamp's rays fell on his face, but the likeness I had seen in the shade had vanished. For an instant I could have imagined him Mr. Grey. It was a glorious night, and we were soon driving along the moonlit road. The stars twinkling in the clear frosty sky; the hoarfrost glistening on the trees and fields made a picturesque scene. Ours was a lake district,

and now and then we came across a skating party whose noisy mirth and laughter, borne towards us on the frosty air broke the stillness of a splendid night. Cecil was, as usual, full of fun, but my father and Mr. Grey both seemed silent and thoughtful. The latter had been called away on business some time before, and since his return his mind seemed to me preoccupied. My pride was a little hurt at his seeming absence of mind. "He might have noticed me and my pretty dress a little," I thought. He had never even glanced in my direction when he joined us in the hall, and since then he had not looked toward me. Our drive ended, we entered into the brilliantly lighted ball-room, made doubly brilliant by the bright happy faces and many tinted dresses of the guests. It was to me as if a whirlwind of happiness had entered the room—all cares, doubts and fears seemed cast aside by everyone present—they talked and laughed as if life were meant for nothing else. I felt very happy. I danced many dances with Mr. Grey, and soon completely forgot any little imaginary slight I had received from him. I knew that my happiness was due to the very perceptible attention of a married man, but I was too excited, too happy, to realize that it was wrong. Cecil I had only met once or twice since our arrival, and then it was just in passing that his bright merry eye caught mine, or his joyful voice sounded in my ear and I hardly noticed him. Another time I would have seen that he danced nearly every dance with Mary Lee, a girl whom I detested with all the thoughtlessness and ardor of youth. She was young, and some called her pretty, with an abundance of dense gold hair, large expressionless blue eyes and a colourless face. Cold, hard-hearted, conceited, sarcastic and calculating, I had always dreaded her influence on Cecil, for

I knew she was not the girl to marry a penniless man and was only indulging her vanity at Cecil's expense. But I had eyes and ears for one alone, until the night was pretty far advanced. It was then I heard a conversation not meant for me to hear. I did not mean to listen, but once I heard a name that was dear to me mentioned, it riveted me to the spot. It ran thus:—"That fellow Grey!—Yes!—I have heard stories of him—married I believe and ill-treated his unfortunate wife—left her to starve and ran away to Australia—probably with some girl—never heard, but shouldn't wonder in the least. Wife drank they say—he drove her to it likely—how well preserved he is and the gayest of the gay evidently—hard-hearted ruffian! Mrs. J—— knows something of the wife, or rather, she traced her sometime after he had left her. She was then in absolute want. I have heard something of her of late years—can't recollect." Then the slanderess moved away and I heard no more. Before long Mr. Grey came up to me to claim a promised waltz, but I pleaded a head-ache—feeling too sick at heart to dance. All in a few minutes my happiness was crushed. Bright faces lost their brightness for me. The strains of the gay music was hateful to my ears. I wanted to be alone to think over what I had just heard. "Had he really ill-treated her and left her to starve?" I shuddered at the thought. "Let me take you home. You really look ill and cold," he said in the kindest tone. "Could that voice ever have been unkind?" I asked myself, and my heart responded "No!" while in my ears kept ringing "Heartless ruffian!" "Yes take me home," was my reply, "I'm sick of this: I hate balls! I'll never go to another." "Has anything annoyed you?" he said, as we drove away. "Yes," I replied, "everything has, I am disappointed." "Strange," he said, "the prettiest, best-dressed, most

fascinating girl in the room, with her choice of partners leaving it disappointed—something must have gone wrong." "Do you think me well-dressed? I did not think you noticed my dress, or me." He looked at me doubtfully, so I added, "just at first." "Not notice your dress," and his voice sank into a whisper. "Well, a compliment from an old fellow like me is not much appreciated, else I would say that yours was the only dress, and you the only girl I cared to look at there," and in the darkness of the night, with only the stars as witnesses, he took my hand in his. Immediately that brought me to myself. "How dare you," I said, "speak like that to me? How can you have the heart to do so, and your lawful wife living—living, and what is more starving?" No sooner were the words said than I would have given worlds to be able to recall them—they needed explanation, and how was I to give it? He said not a word for fully ten minutes, (they seemed like hours,) there was silence. Then aggravated by the remembrance of what I had said, hating myself thoroughly for my ill-nature, and above all, maddened to think he had not justified himself, I burst into tears. He took no heed of my sobs; he seemed absorbed in his own reflections, and his face looked ghastly and fixed in the glimmer of the carriage-lamp. Some time elapsed, then he said, "I am very sorry to have offended you. I'm an old fool. Will you forgive me?" "Forgive you!" I muttered through my sobs, "Will you ever forgive me? I shall never forgive myself." "Will you excuse me drawing up the painful subject again?" and his voice sounded dry and hard, "There is one question you will oblige me exceedingly by answering. From whom did you hear that my wife was living and starving?" What was left for me to do but to repeat the conversation I had overheard, which I did word for word. "The world is cruel," he muttered, "God knows how much of that

story is true. It is years since my lips have uttered my wife's name—her memory is hateful to me. I was a mere boy when I married. She deserved no respect, no consideration from me. I thought her dead, or I would not have set foot on Irish soil, but my proofs of her death are wanting. All my researches up to the present have failed to bring her fate to light. It was fortunate you heard that conversation—never regret having repeated it to me—this Mrs. J—may be able to furnish the missing link in the chain of her destiny. You will say good bye to me now. I leave early in the morning, forever, if I cannot return to you unfettered. Should she still live, then good bye, to you, to Ireland, to home, and to happiness. But tell me, before I go, it will give me energy to fight against fate, should things come to the worst; if I were free, could you give your heart, your future into the keeping of an old fellow, old enough to be your father?" "Yes!" I sobbed out. "God bless you, good bye!" and his voice seemed choked and unsteady. "Not good bye," I said, "I don't like the word," as the carriage drove up to the door. "I leave you with my favorite motto, 'Hope on, hope ever.'" My head reeled and my eyes were burning like coals of fire when I reached my room. To go to bed was out of the question. The idea of rest was repugnant to me. My blood was boiling with excitement; sitting still would have driven me mad; so I paced the room with my burning hands pressed strongly against my still more burning forehead, trying in vain to lull the mental agony which is far more painful and harder to be borne than bodily pain. Some hours must have passed thus, before the sound of footsteps on the stairs announced to me that my father and Cecil had returned. A few minutes passed, and then a gentle tap at my door startled me, and Cecil's voice saying, "Bell, are you still up? I want to speak to

you." I opened the door. The light he held in his hand flashed on my pale face, making more visible my dishevelled hair and swollen red eyes. He put his strong arm round me and said, "What is the matter Bell? You have been crying." "I am ill," I replied, "I want rest, a good sleep will make me all right," and I would have shut him out, but he put his back against the door and prevented me closing it. "My happiness was complete Bell," he said, "before I saw you looking so done up and I came to tell you of it first. Would it be selfish of me if I intrude the story of my luck—for I am a lucky fellow—on you when you are suffering and cast down?" "Speak," I said, for something unpleasant was beginning to dawn on me. "Mary Lee has promised to be my wife," he continued. "Congratulate me, will you not?" for I was standing motionless. "Congratulate you!" I repeated, "Never!" and then, "Cecil! I hate her and you know it. Choose between her love and mine, if you accept hers you reject mine. Marry her and henceforth you and I are nothing to one another, have nothing more in common. You will become like her, mean, and selfish and she will do all in her power, if she has not already done so, to steal my brother's love from me." I retreated with these words, banging the door after me, then, throwing myself on the bed, I cried myself to sleep, and dreamed.

It was evening. The rays of the setting sun were bathing the fields, already golden with ripe swaying corn, in a flood of golden light. I was wandering by a river, clear as crystal, bright as liquid silver and rippling away—each ripple like a cluster of glistening diamonds—through sun-lit vales. The fields were thronged with reapers, clothed in flowing white garments, and a light was on their brows that I thought from its radiance must be the light of God. Everything looked strange, dazzling and mysterious. There was music in the air—it

came from the other side of the river. Looking across, I saw hundreds of angels with harps of gold—they were too dazzling to look at but for a second, so I covered my eyes with my hands, and shut them out. Then all was dark to me, and presently a small voice, close to my ear, whispered: "Eyes of sin! eyes of sin!" quite distinctly and another voice, well known to me—It was Fred Grey's voice, broke the stillness and came on, borne on the strains of the harps of gold, over the crystal river and said in yearning tones, "Cecil my son!" "Cecil my son!" and all was still. Soon the small voice sighed rather than whispered in my ear, "Trouble is brewing. He has already passed to the other side, whither you cannot go just yet. You are not ready and you lack faith. Faith is the only stepping stone across. Those reapers yonder in their dazzling white apparel are as black as night in the world's eyes. Sinners call them a dark name—it is Death!" Again the voice came across the river and twice again it said distinctly, "Cecil my son! Cecil my son!"

I awoke with the cold perspiration streaming down my forehead. It is no dream, I thought, it is a vision. I did not appear at breakfast that morning, in fact the day was far advanced when I ventured to make my appearance down stairs. My mother alone was indoors when I did. She, attributed my sickly look and languor to last night's dissipation, so made no remark. "Fred was called away early this morning on business," she said after a while. I bit my lip till it bled, but could not say a word. "Cecil told me this morning," she continued, "that he told you last night of the important step he has taken without consulting any of us. You of course disapprove of what he has done." I could not trust myself to speak on the subject. "Mother," I said, "I am too weak and ill to talk on such a painful matter now. Defer our conversation about it." Days passed

Cecil and I met constantly, but he never looked towards me, or I towards him; nor did we speak a word to one another. Weeks dragged wearily along. James with his wife and children left us, the children leaving a blank in our home and hearts. One afternoon more than a month after Fred's departure, I was sitting all alone by the drawing-room fire. My mother had gone to pay some visits, and I contemplated spending rather a dreary evening, when the sound of wheels on the gravel outside caught my ears. Nearer and nearer it came, and stopped at the hall-door. "It matters little to me," I thought, "visitors likely," and I was not at home to anyone. Feeling very weary I dropped my knitting and gazed at the fire, finding companionship and a little comfort in its genial glow. I dozed, and the same voice that was wafted across the stream in my dream broke the stillness of the room. It no longer said "Cecil my son!" but "Bell, my child!" I started to my feet in an instant. Fred was standing before me. He had brought good news for us both—he was free. His wife had died many years ago but another bit of intelligence had come to his knowledge. She had left a son, and he meant to trace that child—his child—who must now, if living, be a man. Some information he had got, led him to believe that the mother had deserted it, when it was but a tiny baby.

My dream flashed on me in the twinkling of an eye, and I told it all to him there and then. "Cecil my son!" and surely never wore father and son more alike—the same manly bearing, flashing black eyes and noble brow. We talked it over and both agreed that there could be little doubt about it. Cecil and his deserted child were one and the same. We compared dates, they suited and fitted into one another exactly. But for my dream he might never have been recognized. My father and mother were greatly astonished, but were fully

satisfied with Cecil's identity. We agreed to say nothing of it to anyone, till satisfactory proofs were sought and secured.

That night Fred proposed for me to my father and was joyfully received in the family as my intended husband. Cecil kissed me and wished me every happiness, with tears in his eyes, and my anger towards him melted away as he did so. "Forgive me Cecil," I said, "may your future be as bright as the horizon of mine is now, and may your wife grow more like you every day." He turned away, and shortly afterwards left the room.

Next morning was the happiest that had ever dawned for me. It was a bright cheerful frosty morning and every one seemed in good spirits. A day's shooting was proposed among the gentlemen, and soon after breakfast they set out. It was about noon that I heard a man's step on the stairs—it was light and unsteady, and entered Cecil's room. A few seconds and I heard a heavy thud on the floor, as if something had fallen. I rushed up stairs, feeling down deep in my very heart that something had happened. I knocked at the door, there was no answer. I burst it in and saw Cecil seated near the window, his gun lying on the floor near him, where he had evidently thrown it. His head was resting on his hand, and his eyes were glaring like a madman's from under his heavy brows. Looking through the window I saw a crowd of people approaching the house. "What has happened?" I exclaimed wildly. No answer. I put my hand on his shoulder and shook him. A defiant look came into his eyes. I recoiled before it. I saw he was mad. Then it passed away, and becoming more like himself he cried out in

tones of agony, "Poor Grey! I have shot him, shot him dead." "Good God," I screamed, my lover! and then I actually shrieked, I don't know why—perhaps it was to try and rouse him—"Your father," and sank on the floor.

I need hardly tell you it was an accident. I will pass over years of grief which ensued—years in which sorrow for my lover's untimely fate, and sorrow for Cecil struggled together, for he, poor fellow had quite lost his reason. They were weary years, and many passed before I laid my dear parents, within a short time of each other, to rest; then in his great goodness, God restored Cecil to me, and I have ever since had him to care for and love while journeying on together through life, and we have well nigh reached the brink now. His reason came back completely, he was able to resume his studies, and take out his degree in medicine. He has reached the top of the ladder in his profession, and has written some valuable medical works. He went to London for three weeks on business, and has returned this Xmas morning. He never married—his little romance has long since been forgotten, or laid out of sight. I believe the girl married (I really forget now) very soon after the tragic death of Cecil's father. Cecil recovered from his madness and quite aware of the relationship between him and the man he had accidentally slain he determined never to marry and to keep me company, bound to each other as we were by bonds forged by the same sorrowful bereavement.

And now you know what echoes the past gives back to the Christmas Chimes.